

P.B. 210 482
4214 R. Alexman

THE
DIVINITY
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION,
Proved both from
Its External and Internal
EVIDENCES.

Τεῖς δὲ μυεῖοι εἰπὺν ἐπὶ χροὺ πρηνεοτέρω
Ἀθάνατοι Ζῶοι, οὐλακε δυνήτων Ανδρῶπων.
Oper. & Dier. lib. 1. ver. 250.

Les gens du commun n'ont ni les temps, ni les moyens, ni les lumières nécessaires pour juger de leur Croyance. La Religion leur est en quelque façon donnée avec la Naissance par leur Parents. Dans une telle Disposition, il leur faut quelque chose de sensible, & qui les fixe par son Eclat.

Picart de Rel. Ceremonies.

L O N D O N :

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THE
PREFACE.



HAVE always
thought, the most
infallible Argu-
ments that can be
brought against In-
fidels in Defence of Christianity,
are those, which prove both from
the Weakness of Human Under-
standing, as well as from the
Religions, that existed in the
World, when Christ came to re-
form

iv The PREFACE.

form it, the absolute Necessity of a Divine Instructor; and that without such an Assistant, true Religion not only would never have been revealed; but likewise it could never have been diffused through the World.

THIS is what I have endeavoured to prove, and if I have succeeded in the Attempt, I hope the Service that will then be done to Christianity will atone for any Mistakes in this imperfect Essay.

LUKE



LUKE ii. 14.

*Glory to God in the Highest,
and on Earth, Peace,
Good-will towards Men.*



IF Christianity had been designed for the Conviction only of the Wise and Learned: or, if the Minds of Men had been indifferent in Matters of Faith, when its Divine Laws were proposed to them; there would then have needed no other Motive to have convinced Mankind of the Reasonableness of its Doctrines than its Moral Duties. But as there was no Nation at that Time in the World, but what had

6 *The Divinity of the*

an Established Religion, (a) which derived its Authority and Esteem from the Pretence of a divine Original, or a Revelation from Heaven. So we find, in fact, from the Records of all History, that not only their Religious Rites and Ceremonies were secured from Alteration and Contempt by such Means, that were insurmountable to Human Learning; but likewise that Religion and Superstition were so strangely entangled together, that Human Reason could not separate them: that none but a Divine Messenger from Heaven could have discover'd true Religion. And that for these following Reasons.

I. BECAUSE the Founders of Superstition had taken effectual Care to discountenance Truth and Virtue, and to propagate and support their idle Notions. First, by persuading the Obstinate and Illiterate, who are in every Age vastly superior in Number and Power to the Wise and the Learned, to receive their ridiculous Dreams for Truths founded on Divine Revelation. Which Artifice one would have thought sufficient to have secured

(a) *Vid.* A Letter to Dr. Waterland.

cured their Impositions from Change or Insult, without any other Contrivance; for when once the Miscellaneous Multitude are persuaded, that their Religious Rites are of Divine Extraction; there is nothing so incredible, but what they are made to believe, and nothing so absurd but what they are persuaded furiously to support and maintain.

But secondly, that there might not be the least Avenue open for Truth and Reason to appear. These Spreaders likewise of strange Doctrines basely compelled the judicious Few to Silence by enacting penal Laws to punish them, whenever they should presume by their ingenious and useful Labours, to lay open to the World the Cheat and Forgery of their Established Religion; which Laws were duely executed as often as Occasion served. For no sooner did any brave and illustrious Hero in Literature among the *Greeks* endeavour to extirpate the Follies that were then engrafted into the Vitals of Religion; than *Socrates's* (b) Cup was

(b) *Socrates* was put to Death for confessing the Unity of the Godhead, and that the Gods of his Country were but Vanities. Vid. Aul. Gellium & Apuleium.

was ready prepared for him; or *Diagoras's* (c) Frights every where attending him. How careful too the *Egyptians* were for the Support of their Established Religion may be seen from *Herodotus*, who assures us, that they would not so much as touch the Knife or Dish of one, who dissented from them. As for the *Romans* they twice banished from amongst them the *Egyptian* Gods, because their Rites were contrary to those practised at *Rome*. The first Time (d) under the Consulship of *Piso* and *Gabinus*: and the second in the Reign of *Tiberius* (e); and their several Edicts published against the Christians, by different Emperors, are sufficient Testimonies, that these polite People

(c) The *Athenians* could not prosecute *Diagoras*, for denying the Existence of God, because his Verses begun thus: *That all Things were governed by a Godhead*. It must be then for burning the Image of *Hercules* by way of Contempt to the Established Religion of his Country. Vid. *Dupleissie*. The *Athenians* likewise banished *Protagoras* only for doubting of their Gods. Cum Abderitem Protagoram, Athenienses, consule potius quam profane de Divinitate disputantem, & expulerunt suis finibus, & in concione ejus scripta deduxerint. Vid. *Min. Felicem*, & *Cicer. de Natura Deorum*, lib. 1.

(d) Vid. *Dionem*, Lib. iv.

(e) *Taciti Annalium* Lib. ii.

Christian Religion. 9

ple severely prosecuted the Disturbers of their Eſtabliſhed Religion. And among the *Jews*, it was a heinous Crime, and followed with many bitter Punishments; either to add or diminish any Thing from the Law of *Moses*. That it was morally impossible, under ſuch curſed Slavery, for Truth and Argument to make any Progreſs in the World, without the Aſſiſtance of a Power, that ſhould open the Eyes of the giddy Multitude, more than the ſpeculative Points of true Morality; for with them

*Segnius irritant animos demiffa per aurem;
Quam quæ ſunt oculis ſubjecta fidelibus. (f)*

The Author therefore of our Religion for the Conviction of theſe Creatures; and, conſequently for the eaſier propagating of his Doctrine, thought proper to work many and divers Miracles, which are manifeſt Proofs of Power, that as his Leſſons of Morality were ſufficient to bring over to his Party Men famous in their Generation for their Worth and Learning; ſo theſe ſecondary Aids of Chriſtianity might convince the Obſtinate and Illiterate of the Reaſonableneſs of that Religion, which

(f) Hor. de Arte Poetica.

10 *The Divinity of the*

which made Profelytes of the Moralists and Philosophers, from its native Purity.

WHO contrary to that other Tribe of Men, are not to be frighted into the Belief of any Religion, howsoever well recommended or attested by outward Signs. For they are well assured, that no Religion can come from God; or be countenanced by him, but what proves its Divine Original, from the noble and rational Conceptions it gives us of the infinite Perfections of Almighty God; so as that his Honour and Glory may be rightly and truly promoted, by our religious Addresses to him; and by enforcing such Laws for publick Use, as concern only the Good and Benefit of Mankind. These are the Proofs, these the Miracles that must demonstrate the Divinity of any Religion to Men of Sense and Learning; for it is very absurd to imagine, that God should reveal any Doctrine, or any Belief, but what are fitted for these two great Designs, which are rightly stated in the Christian Religion; if it is understood by its Followers, as its Author really intended it should be.

FOR he did not design Christianity should so be learnt, as if every Word, or Sentence, spoken by him, were proposed

Christian Religion. 11

posed for practical Duties to all Christians, of all Ages, and of all Countries. For as those Apothegms, Narrations, Parables and Histories which were spoken by Christ on particular Occasions, and to particular Persons, were spoken to such particular Persons, and on such particular Occasions as never can happen again; so nothing can be more absurd and irrational, than to make these Lectures, or private Instructions, the Standard of Faith to future Generations. And that there were many Things of this Sort spoken by Christ, and afterwards recorded by the Apostles, we are told by St. *John*, who likewise gives us a Reason, why they were not all mentioned in Scripture. *Because, says he, if they should be written every one, I suppose, that even the World itself could not contain the Books that should be written,* John xxi. 25. As for those which are written, we find, they are so blended with the weightier Matters of Christianity; that it is most difficult, nay, impossible for an incurious Eye to distinguish one from the other. But though they are undistinguishable to unlettered Men; yet to Men of Learning and Judgment, who know, that it is contrary to the Nature and Reason of the Divine Wisdom
and

12 *The Divinity of the*

and Goodness to reveal any Thing, but what promotes its own Glory, and the Good of Men, so they want not the Aid of Miracles to help them in the finding out, what was designed for publick Duties; and what was related by the Apostles by Way of Embellishment to the Life of Christ.

BUT least the undiscerning Crowd should blunder in this truly, useful and publick spirited Religion, by their jumbling private Admonitions and publick Duties together, and making one as absolutely necessary to be followed as the other; and so by their injudicious Interpretations bring Shame, instead of Honour upon our most holy Religion. This Miracle therefore of the heavenly Host was wrought (as those of Christ were for their Conviction) to shew them, at one View, the great End and ultimate Design of Christianity, which they will find, if they dare trust to the Credit of these Divine Messengers, without any further Scrutiny, to consist only in promoting the Glory of God, and the Good of Men upon Earth.

II. BUT though Miracles were designed for the Conviction of the Multitude;
and

and without which our Religion could not have been propagated : yet we had still been lost in a Labyrinth of destructive Errors, had not our Blessed Redeemer known better, than the most wise and penetrating Philosopher , to separate Truth from Falshood. For there were so many false Doctrines so closely cemented with those of Truth, that though the wisest Philosophers and Poets had too much Knowledge to receive every Article of their Religion for Divine Commands ; yet they had at the same Time too much Weakness to discover all the Errors that were publickly professed: As is evident from the Confession of one of the greatest Masters of Reason that Antiquity ever produced ; namely, *Tully*, who tells us, That he and his Sect were not of the Number of those Philosophers, who could see nothing true in Religion ; but they were of the Number of those (g), who did acknowledge, that Truth and Falshood were become so vastly alike, that it was beyond the Reach of Human

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(g) Non enim sumus ii, quibus nihil rerum esse videatur ; sed ii, qui omnibus veris falsa quædam adjuncta esse dicamus, tanta Similitudine, ut in iis nulla insit certa judicandi & adsentienti nota. De Natura Deorum.

14 *The Divinity of the*

Wisdom to distinguish one from the other. Therefore the best Method that he could find out to prevent his Contemporaries from falling into Superstition, was, by desiring them (*b*) to imitate not only the Philosophers, but likewise their Ancestors, by making a Distinction between superstitious and religious Idolatry. The same mad Advice did *Virgil* give (*i*).

Vana Superstitio, Veterumq; ignara Deorum.

And *Horace* (*k*) reckoned the *Rectos Deos*, i. e. 'true Religion, being restored to the Romans by *Augustus*, to be one of those great Blessings, that were procured to them by that Emperor. It would be superfluous to mention the different Opinions among the *Greek Philosophers*, since *Cicero* has performed that Task in his first Book, (*Of the Nature of the Gods*) where the Weakness of Human Reason is fully displayed; for there we shall find not one Philosopher of them all, but what hath sullied the Purity of his Discourse with

(*b*) Non enim Philosophi solum, sed etiam majores nostri Superstitionem a Religione sepeverunt. Ibid.

(*i*) *Æneid.* 8.

(*k*) *Od.* 4. l. 4.

Christian Religion. 15

with some abominable Vice and egregious Absurdity.

WHENCE we may learn, that we had still been groping, for all our boasted Reason, in miserable Darkness, had it not pleased a Being superior in Understanding, to that of Human Reason, to separate for the Use of the Wise and Learned, the false Tenets of Idolatry, from the pure and undefiled Religion of God; since the finest Reasoners before Christianity were incapable to discover all the Faults and Reveries of their Established Religion. Therefore, if we must make the Religion of Nature our Theme, let us with the great Mr. *Wollaston* confess (1), that we never should, by the Strength of our own Reason, find out true Religion; and that we want a Guide to direct us in some necessary Truths, that Human Reason is too weak to discover. Here likewise let us observe, that though natural Reason is not strong enough to discover Truth; yet it is clear enough to perceive it, and the Necessity of its Deductions, when proposed and shewn.

HAVING thus shewn, that unless our Saviour had separated the gross Errors of

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16 *The Divinity of the*

Superstition, for the Instruction of the Wise and Learned, from the Doctrines of true Religion: As well as performed Works of Miracles, for the Conviction of the Unlettered, we never should have had true Religion in the World.

I SHALL now proceed to the Words of the Text, and consider wherein Christ promoted,

I. THE Glory of God.

II. PEACE upon Earth.

III. GOOD Will towards Men.

I. CHRIST promoted the Glory of God: First, Among the *Jews*, who though they were the peculiar People of God, and taught more rational Conceptions of his Divine Perfections, than the Rest of the World; yet they instead of giving unto the Lord the Honour due unto his Name, by worshipping the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness, wrought Folly in *Israel*, by their too much Reliance on external Performances. For they vainly imagined, that the Glory of God and the Salvation of Men were secured: if they

Christian Religiou. 17

they did but observe their Days and Months, and Times and Years, without any Regard to Moral Virtues. But as this Kind of Worship did greatly debase the Infinite Perfections of Almighty God; so it met with just Reproof from our Saviour, who told them: *In vain do ye worship God, teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men; for laying aside the Commandments of God, such as Judgment, Mercy and Truth, ye hold the Traditions of Men; such as washing of Pots and Cups, and other outward Ceremonies, that you make the Word of God of none Effect thro' your Traditions,* Mark i. 1. But that they might no longer affront Almighty God, by offering him a Worship which he intirely abhorred, he tells them, God is pleased with that Worship only, that declares the vast Love and Veneration his Creatures have for him, by loving him with all their Hearts, and with all their Souls, and with all their Minds, and with all their Strength, *Mark xii. 30.* - This is that rational Service, says he, that your heavenly Father prefers to all Burnt-Offerings and Oblations.

Secondly, THEY dishonoured God by denying him to be the Common Father of Mankind, which was in short depriv-

18 *The Divinity of the*

ing him of some of his most valuable Attributes; namely, Wisdom, Justice and Mercy. And this they in a most foolish Manner did, when they acknowledged themselves to be the only People, for whom God had any Care or Concern, and that they were his peculiar Favours, for their being descended from *Abraham*, and their Adherence to Circumcision, and other typical Rites: And for these Reasons, and not for Obedience to Morality, they believed God granted his Favours and Blessings unto them, and excluded the Rest of Mankind from any Share of them. But what! has God forgotten to be gracious? And will he shut up his loving Kindness in Displeasure from those, that seek him by the best Means that they are able? Are his Mercies so few in Number that he can indulge only one Set of Men with them, and refuse them to all the Rest. A circumcised *Jew* may believe these Cruelties of the Father of Mercies, if he pleaseth; but a Christian must confess, “ That God is no Respector of Persons, but “ in every Nation, he that feareth him, “ and worketh Righteousness is acceptable with him, *Acts* x. 25.

I SHALL

I SHALL now in the second Place consider, how the Glory of God was most eminently display'd by the Christian Religion to the *Gentiles*. And this will easily appear by taking a short View of their Religion.

THE *Gentiles* espoused such mean and ridiculous Things for the Objects of their Worship, that they greatly dishonoured the most high God, by giving unto his Creatures the Honour which was due unto Himself. For so foolish and senceless were they, as to pay divine Honours to the Sun, Moon and Stars, and other inanimate Things, whilst the Maker of them was intirely disregarded, or forgotten: Nay, so great was their Stupidity and Folly, as even to deify and pay divine Worship to those Wretches, who, by their Ambition and Cruelty, became the Plague and Pest of Mankind; for nothing recommended a Hero (*m*) sooner to the Dignity of a God, than depopulating Cities, and laying waste whole Nations by Fire and Sword: And as if these God-Monsters delighted as much
in

(*m*) Et tot templa Deum Romæ, quot in orbe sepulchra Heroum numerare licet: quos fabula magnæ nobilitat; noster populus veneratus adorat. Prudentius contra Symmachum.

20 *The Divinity of the*

in Blood and Slaughter, when in the happy Fields of Elysium, as upon Earth, their mad Votaries offered, in a most scandalous and barbarous Manner, human Sacrifices unto them.

Tantum Religio potuit suadere Matorum.(n)

These monstrous and inhuman Sacrifices (o) prevailed not only throughout (p) the East, but likewise in Spain (q), Germany (r), France and Britain (s). And tho' the

(n) Lucretius, l. 1.

(o) St. Jerom relates, that this Custom was used by the Eastern Nations from the very Infancy of Heathenism. Primum omnium scelerum, pro Deo Idola venerata est, & adorasti opera manuum tuarum, Ez. 22. The Manner of sacrificing to these Heroes he says in 46 of *Isaiab* was, Non solum humanas Hostias captivorum ignobilium Mortalium, sed & suos Liberos immolarent.

(p) *Eusebius*, tells us, Κεῖνω μὲν Φοίνικες καὶ ἑκασον ἑτοῖμα ἔδουον τὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ μωρογενῆ καὶ πένητον. Ed. Par. p. 646. de laudibus.

(q) The Spaniards sacrificed Human Creatures unto their Gods, cutting off their Right Hands to offer them up. Vid. Lewis de Mayenne Turquet on Spain.

(r) Deum maxime Mercurium colunt, cui certis diebus humanis quoque hostiis litare fas habent. Herculem & Martem concessis hostiis placant. Pars Suevorum & Iisidi sacrificat. Tacitus de Mor. German. cap. 9.

(s) *Caesar* speaking of the Manner of sacrificing in

the *Romans* grew at last too polite and humane to delight in such hellish Cruelties: yet there was no Fountain (t) or Hill (u) among them too mean to be unconsecrated: nor no Person too cruel to be refused a Seat among their Gods (x): nor no Action too obscene (y) or vicious to be denied Admittance into their religious Assemblies. In short, there was no Place in the habitable World free from the grossest Impieties: and though one Place might be more fruitful in Errors than another, yet there was no Country to be found, but what greatly dishonoured God, and greatly debased human Rea-

in *Britain*, which was the same in *France*, says, Immani Magnitudine Simulacra habent: quorum contexta viminibus membra vivis Hominibus complent; quibus succensis, circumventi flamma exanimantur Homines. Gal. l. 6.

(t) Hujus Nympha Loci, Sacri Custodia fontis Dormio, dum blandæ sentio murmur aquæ.

Parce meum, quisquis tangis cava marmora, somnum Rumpere, sive bibas, sive lavare tace.

Nymphis Loci

Bibe, Lava,

Tace. —

Brouw. de Adorat.

(u) Et sacrum Phœbo Soracte frequentant.

Silius J. l. 8.

(x) Witness *Caligula*, *Caracalla*, &c.

(y) In Liberi sacris honesta pudenda virilia coronabat, spectante Multitudine. S. Aug. de Civit. l. 3. c. 21.

22 *The Divinity of the*

Reason, by their monstrous Opinions and abominable Practices, that the Christian Religion deserveth our highest Esteem and Veneration : for not only displaying these Vanities, and putting in their Stead the God, that made the Heaven and the Earth and all Things that are therein ; but for directing us likewise in that Worship, which is agreeable to his Divine Nature. For it tells us, that *God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in Truth*, John iv. 24. That is, they that expect to be assisted by God, in their Prayers to him, must address him in such a Form, or Manner, as their Spirit, or Understanding, tells them to be according to the Information of Truth, or in other Words, according to the Dictates of right Reason.

HAVING thus briefly shewn, wherein Christ promoted the Glory of God amongst Men. I shall proceed, in the next Place, to consider, What is meant by Peace upon Earth.

THE Peace here mentioned ought not to be understood of an universal Peace, which some learned Men have falsely affirmed to have existed throughout the World.

World at the Birth of Christ. Because scarce in any Period of Time have there been more violent inland Wars, than at that Juncture. For then it was that (z) *Drusus* fell in *Germany* (a), after having made some Desolation among those Barbarians. Then it was that *Varus* (b) and the best and choicest Legions of the *Roman* Empire were cut in Pieces, by that warlike Nation, to the sensible Affliction of *Augustus*. And then it was, that *Tiberius* (c) was sent to subdue that People, though to no Purpose; for the greatest Part of *Germany* was never conquered by that

(z) *Drusus* enim licet is solus aliquandiu minimam Germaniæ Particulam in Provinciam redigere incubuerit: tamen Cæsus apud Bingium satis concessit. Elias Schedius de Diis Germ. Syng. 1. cap. 1.

(a) The *German* War began about twelve Years before Christ's Birth. Vid. Marshall's Chron. Tabulæ.

(b) Nunc summa deflenda est Exercitus omnium fortissimus, Disciplina, Manu, Experientia, Bellorum inter Romanos Milites Princeps. Vel. Paterc. l. 2.

(c) Nec Litem moveat, plurimos Imp. se a devictis Germanis Germanicos dixisse falso gloriati sunt Titulo; quod vel in Gallia, aliisque Provinciis parva aliqua Strage excursantes quoldam Milites Germaniæ vel vicerint, vel in Amicitiam receperint, vel domita modica Germaniæ Regione
mox

24 *The Divinity of the*

that Emperor. *Lucius Florus* (d) actually excludes the *Germans*, except some that dwelt betwixt the *Danube* and the *Rhine* for making, like the Rest of the World, a servile Peace with *Augustus*. *Aurelius Victor* (e) too declares, *Adjectis Imperio Civium Rhætis Illyricoque, as pacata Externarum Gentium ferocia, nisi Germaniæ*. Nor was there ever a Peace concluded betwixt these two Nations in this Emperor's Reign, excepting a small Truce at the Death of *Drusus*, to the great, though short liv'd, Joy of the *Romans* (f). So that the Multitude of the Heavenly Host could never be sent by God to celebrate an Universal Peace, when so great a Part of *Europe* were up in Arms. Moreover, there never was a Peace of that high Concern to Mankind, or of that long Continuance in the Reign of *Augustus*, especially about the Birth of Christ, that was worth the Acclamations of

mox totam Germaniam domitasse luxuriosis verbis retulerint, inter quos Tiberius Cæsar se Germanicum dici volunt. Vide Schedium de Diis Germ. Syngr. 1. C. 1.

(d) Omnibus ad Occasum & Meridiem pacatis Gentibus, ad Septentrionem quoque duntaxat intra Rhenum atque Danubium, Lib. iv.

(e) Lib. ii.

(f) Breve igitur Gaudium, Vel. Paterc. 1. 2.

of so glorious a Multitude. These Words therefore must have some other Meaning than chanting the Praises of a temporal Peace, which, if it had really existed, would have added no Lustre to the Embassy of this illustrious Company.

THIS Peace then I take to signify, that joyous and spiritual Peace, which all good and serious Christians are sensible of, when they consider that they are now no longer Aliens with God, but that he has been pleased to reconcile himself unto them, by the Blood of Christ. *Being justified*, says St. Paul to the Romans, *we have Peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ*, Chap. v. 5. Before this Reconciliation, Men were at Enmity with God, by their revolting from his just and righteous Laws. But now Christ has restored us to his Favour; by his Doctrines and Intercession we have free Access to God, for our Acceptance of our Persons and Prayers: By thus making us at Peace with God, our Saviour has left us a Peace, which was not in the Power of the greatest Conqueror of the World to give. And surely this Peace of Conscience, or Reconciliation of God to Man, was more worthy the Exultations and Triumphs of the Multitude of the Heavenly Host, than

26 *The Divinity of the*

any temporal Peace betwixt Nation and Nation. Besides, this spiritual Joy is more agreeable to their amiable Characters, for if these divine Beings are pleased to rejoice at the Salvation of one Sinner? How great must their Joy be at the Salvation of the whole Race of Mankind. But that these Words, *Peace upon Earth*, signify a spiritual and not a temporal Peace, we have the Authority of St. *Austin* (g) who says, *Messiae spirituale Regnum est, & quaecunque eo pertinent, spiritualia fere sunt, & Pax illa per Christum promissa & parta, Animorum & Conscientiae Pax est.*

Thirdly, Good Will towards Men: As the World was beholden to the Preaching of Christ for the true Worship of God; so was it for the Duties, which regard ourselves as sociable Beings: And this will as demonstrably appear true, as the other, if we compare those Duties, it commandeth to be followed, with those it contradicts or forbids.

FIRST then, The *Jews* were so unacquainted with Acts of Charity, Benevolence

(g) August. Prop. 9. cap. 63.

violence and Humanity, that they were remarkable for nothing so much as shewing all the Rancour and Bitterness they could invent against those, that dissented from'em in Religion. They were taught by the Scribes and Pharisees (those false Expounders of the Law) that as their Forefathers destroyed many Nations upon the Account of Idolatry ; so they ought not to suffer a Stranger to live, or have any Being in their Lands. But as these persecuting Principles were too monstrous to claim God for their Author, our Saviour therefore advises his Disciples not to imitate the *Jews* in this Respect. " But I
" say unto you : (says he) Love your
" Enemies, bless them that curse you ;
" do Good to them that hate you, and
" pray for them that despitefully use you
" and persecute you." The Reason he gives for this Conduct is, " That ye
" may be the Children of your Father,
" which is in Heaven : For he maketh
" the Sun to rise on the Evil and on the
" Good, and sendeth Rain on the Just
" and Unjust. For if ye salute your
" Brethren only; what do ye more than
" others? Do not even the Publicans the
" same, *Matth.* v. 44, 45, 47. The
Meaning of these Words is this : That
C 2 those

28 *The Divinity of the*

those who are Followers of Christ's Doctrines, must imitate God, by approving themselves to be like him, who confines not his Mercies, like these Publicans, to one particular Set of Men; but indiscriminately extends them to all alike; for he pours down his Blessings as plentifully upon the unbelieving *Gentile*, as on the true Believer.

Secondly, The *Jews* bore such an inveterate Hatred to their Fellow Brethren, the *Samaritans*, upon the Account of their differing from them in some outward Ceremonies in the same Religion, that they not only deprived them of the common Necessaries of Life, to the Breach of all social Virtues; but they even carried their furious Zeal so far, as to wish, that a *Samaritan* (b) might have no Part in the Resurrection of the Dead. Monstrous Enthusiasm! So that the Excellency and Usefulness of the Christian Religion doth greatly appear in detesting such barbarous and cruel Tenets. For we are taught by that famous Story of the good *Samaritan*, that our Saviour Jesus Christ, instead of promoting Discord and Confusion in Society, by persecuting and abusing our Dis-

senting

(b) Drusus de trib. Sect. lib. 3. cap. 11:

senting Brethren, upon the Account of Religion, persuades us in the most endearing Manner to support and relieve them. For, says he, *Luke x. 30. a certain Man as he was going from Jerusalem to Jericho*, fell into the Hands of inhuman Men, who stripped him of all he had, and left him weltring in his Gore, and destitute of all those Necessaries, that might bring him Comfort in that forlorn Condition: And whilst he lay thus struggling and panting for Life; by Chance there came that Way a Levite, nay, a Priest, who saw him thus helpless and void of Relief, without affording him the least charitable Assistance; they coldly and unconcernedly passed by on the other Side. But though the Priest and Levite left this poor Wretch in this languishing Condition, who were his Country Men, and of the same Religion in all Respects with himself; when the *Samaritan* saw him, who was of an *Assyrian* Extraction; and whose Religion, though *Jewish* in the essential Points of it, yet he was sure, for deviating from them in some Points of their Religion to be maltraited and insulted by them. Nevertheless, he no sooner saw this helpless Creature in Affliction, than he took Compassion

30 *The Divinity of the*

sion on him, washing his Wounds, and applying healing Ointments to them, and set him on his own Beast, and brought him with Care to the Inn; where he not only supported him with every Thing, that might abate his Illness, or relieve his Pains, whilst with him; but he carried his Charity so far as to pawn his Credit for him. For on the Morrow, when he departed, he took out Two-Pence, and gave them to the Host, and said unto him, whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. The Advice, that the Author of our Religion gave to his Followers, from this Story, was: *Go thou, and do likewise.*

Thirdly, Not only we find the *Jews* deficient in social Virtues towards those that dissented from them in Matters of Religion; but likewise they persecuted, with the utmost Hatred and Revenge, those of the same Consanguinity and Fraternity with themselves. That they were as badly instructed in their Duty towards their Neighbours, as they were in their Duty towards God. They were made to believe, that Sins for which the Law of *Moses* inflicted no external Punishment by the Hands of the Magistrate, might be expiated by Gifts and other outward Offerings,

Offerings, and that they could commit no Sin by taking Revenge, though they drew on the offending Person never so dreadful Inconveniencies, so long as they could bribe God to an Amnesty of their Cruelties, by Gifts and Oblations. But as these Principles rendered them unfit Members of Society; so they were justly exploded by the Christian Religion, which directs its Members in the right Use of their Resentment, by not permitting their Anger to extend to the Hurt or Detriment of the Person that offends; but only to the exposing of his Injustice, by rational and moderate Expostulations. For in Truth Christianity doth not require such an Apathy or Insensibility to Affronts, as not to shew some Uneasiness when provoked, but then we must not suffer our Passion to go beyond the Bounds of Decency and Good Manners. As we are taught by *St. Paul*, who bids us be angry, but then he bids us at the same Time not to sin, by suffering our Anger to be either injurious to the Person offending us; or of long Continuance, *Eph. iv. 26.*

Secondly, THE next Step that Christianity took to reform the World in social Virtues, was to destroy those hurtful Principles of the *Gentiles*.

WHO,

32 *The Divinity of the*

WHO, instead of having those natural Affections strong and powerful towards the Good of the Whole, which, the Gospel assures us, are the Sum and Foundation of all Revealed Religion; distributed amongst Mankind all Sorts of base and wicked Principles, "being without natural Affection, full of Deceit, Envy, Murder, Debates, Malignity, disobedient to Parents." These vile and abominable Affections were practised by all Orders and Degrees of Men, and would still have been practised, had they not been superseded or annihilated by Christ and his Apostles? "who came to civilize the rude unpolished World, and to make Man mild and sociable to Man, by commanding us to follow, one with the other, whatsoever Things are true; --- honest; --- just; --- pure; --- lovely; --- of good Report;" *Phil. iv. 8.* These are the Affections, that Christianity expects, should bind and unite its Members together. And in truth, Human Society is no farther useful and desirable, than whilst it is governed and directed by these glorious Principles. But farther, our Quiet and Happiness in this Life are not all that we are to expect from the Practice of these Christian Duties: But
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it likewise assures us, that we shall enjoy for our good Deeds here, that happy and glorious World, which hath been prepared for the Righteous and Merciful from the Foundation of this. And, on the contrary, if we viciously and scandalously engross the Blessings and Comforts of this to ourselves, and basely pursue our own Pleasures and Desires, to the Hurt and Injury of others, and to the Detriment of the Common Good, we must then expect to meet with all those Punishments, that are so terribly, though justly, denounced against the cruel and unrighteous Man.

Now let us consider a little, what absurd and destructive Doctrines were destroyed by Christ's Coming amongst us; and what an useful, rational and amiable Religion was commanded to be observed, and we must confess, That in the Christian Religion a God appears in an Undertaking truly worthy of a God.

Nec Deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus Inciderit. (i)

I SHALL now, in the last Place, consider the Uses that may be drawn from what has been said.

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(i) Hor. de Arte Poet.

34 *The Divinity of the*

FIRST then, They in a most gross and stupid Manner impose upon Mankind, who maintain, that Human Reason had been sufficient to direct us in the Pursuit of true Religion, without the Instruction of a Divine Messenger. But they, who argue thus fantastically, ought to consider; that they argue contray to Matter of Fact. For had Human Reason been sufficient to guide us in the Way of Truth, we should then have found it in the Productions of some of the ancient Philosophers; many of whom were blessed with as great a Share of Human Reason, and as diligently laboured to find out, wherein Religion and Virtue truly existed, as any modern Reasoner whatsoever: And yet none of them were able to discover their real Existence. For *Tully*, after he had discanted on the Being and Providence of God; on the Immortality of the Soul; on every Subject that approaches Christianity, with the utmost Force of Truth and Argument, that unassisted Reason could be Master of, ends his Inquiries with this doubtful and disheartening Sentence. *Nullum Iudicium interponere (k)*. In vain therefore did he
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(k) Cicero de Divin. Lib. 21.

most beautifully harangue on the Nature and Existence of God: In vain did he make many glorious Descriptions of Moral Virtues: In vain did he recommend them to the Practice of the World, when for ought he knew, they might have no other Existence, than in his own fruitful Imagination. *Plato* (l), because he knew not wherein to place true Religion, says, that every one should worship the Gods of his own Country. And *Socrates* (m) the Birth, Pride, Effort of three thousand Years, speaks of the Immortality of the Soul with great Uncertainty. (n) Ὅτι ἀπερ γὰρ ἡ Ψυχὴ ἀθάνατος ἐστίν, was his constant Tone. To talk thus doubtfully on these important Subjects was all that these great Sages could pretend to: And yet these were the Men, who argued through all the Points of Duty to God and Man, with all the Force of Human Reason, and all the Charms of Human Eloquence; that had it not been for Christianity we had been Idolaters still; since these wonderful Masters of Reason had such ill Success, in the Search

(l) Plato de Leg. l. 4.

(m) Essay on Reason.

(n) Plato in Phædon.

36 *The Divinity of the*

Search after Virtue and true Religion. And perhaps by this Time we might have had a double Number of Deities to those found at *Rome* in the Days of *St. Austin*, which were no less than Thirty Thousand: And had been adoring with the *Egyptians* the Leeks and Onions (o) in our Gardens. “ But blessed be the “ Lord God of *Israel*, for he hath visited and redeemed his People, and hath “ delivered us out of the Hands of these “ our Enemies, that we might serve him “ all the Days of our Life, *Luke* i. 14, 75. Besides, had it been possible for us by the Help of Human Reason to discover our Duty to God and Man; yet what human Expedient can be so proper to keep the World in Order and Decency, like what we find in the Christian Religion. For most certainly the Doctrines and Preaching of the Son of God will ever be of greater Encouragement to us to practise universal Charity, and all other Christian Graces, than the Preaching of any mere Man: His Example of greater Perfection to encourage us to do Good and to eschew Evil, and to dispose and engage us to all Virtue and Piety. They

(o) *Plin. lib. 19.*

They therefore, who affirm Human Reason to be sufficient to direct us in the Pursuit of true Religion, without a Messenger from Heaven, not only impose upon the Understandings of Men by affirming a Lye : But they also act like the worst of mad Men, who take Pleasure in doing Mischief for Mischief Sake, by endeavouring to frustrate the best Means that can be proposed to the World to promote the Glory of God, and universal Love and Charity in it.

Secondly, THEY likewise discredit our most holy Religion, who think so meanly of it, as to require the Assistance of the Secular Power to silence its Enemies and Opposers. But these mighty Pretenders to Religion surely forget the Advice given by two of the Apostles. One of which tells the *Corinthians*, that he would have them examine his Doctrines, and see whether what he said was just and reasonable, before they put it into Practice. " I speak, says St. *Paul*, to the Wise, " judge ye of what I say." The other exhorteth his Followers to be ready always to give an Account to every Man, that asketh you a Reason of the Hope that is in you, with Meekness and Fear, *Pet. iii. 5.* So far were these great Cham-

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38 *The Divinity of the*

pions of Christianity from thinking that their Religion would suffer by an exact and strict Scrutiny, that they exhorted all Men to an open and free Examination of it: And in Truth, the Christian Religion wants not, neither doth it wish for such mean Aids to gain it Admittance amongst the polite and lettered Part of Mankind. For the Duties it proposeth to us for our temporal Security in this, as well as our eternal Happiness in the other World, are of so wise and reasonable a Nature; so well prepared and adapted for all Communities in general, and of each Person in particular, that if it could boast of no other Helps, than its Moral Duties; they were sufficient one would think, to exempt it from Contempt and Ridicule. But it is likewise so well guarded and defended with many noble and external Proofs: that the Christian Religion will never refuse to stand the severest Trials. For it desireth nothing so much to make itself beloved and esteemed, as to be thoroughly known, and the stricter it is examined, the brighter Lustre it will gain; and, like true Gold, will shine the brighter for being seven times refined in the Fire.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, THEY also dishonour the Christian Religion, who, though they have true and just Notions of its Moral Precepts; yet think unjustly of its positive Institutions: "They suppose, if they do justly and love Mercy, and walk humbly with God, without any Regard to positive Duties, that they shall be accepted with him. This most certainly is a great Prejudice: Because these Positives are the very Props and Butteresses that keep the Essentials of Christianity together, by compelling all Christians to a strict Observance of them, and indeed were there not some External Rites made use of to bind Mankind, in a most solemn Manner, to the Acknowledgment of one Faith, much the greatest Proportion of Men would be tossed from one Doctrine to another, to the utter Extirpation of social Virtues, by the cunning Management of skilful Men, who always have it in their Power to dress up any monstrous and absurd Opinion in such an agreeable Garb, as to gain it Admittance amongst the Miscellaneous Multitude. The Design of our Saviour in instituting Positives in his Religion was to prevent such mighty Inconveniencies, that such Variety of Opinions might occasion in

40 *The Divinity of the*

Society. For Baptism was not designed in its original Appointment to convey any supernatural or extraordinary Graces on the Person baptized; but it was intended to lay such a solemn Obligation upon him, as that he should think himself strictly to be taught and instructed in no other Religion, in order to Practice, than that which this Ceremony initiated him into. But then, as this Ordinance was to be administered but once, and that in a State of Infancy, Men might in Time grow supine and careless of the Obligations they laid themselves under, had they not, when they came to Years of Maturity, some other Ceremonies to put them in Mind of their Baptismal Engagement, which should as strongly engage them to the propagating Christian Duties, as the other to be instructed in them. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (p) was ordained, for no other Purpose,

(p) There needs no other Proof to shew, that Baptism and the Supper of the Lord meant no more by the Ancient Fathers and others than solemn Oaths, than their applying or fixing the Word *Sacrament* to them. Which originally signifies an Oath given to Soldiers. *Sacramentum est Signum militare.* "Ορκος στρατιωτικῆς.

Christian Religion. 41

Purpose, than to oblige Christians, by the most awful Affeверations imaginable to the Performance of those Duties that Baptism obliged them to be instructed in. As for Confirmation, it was appointed by the Apostles to require the Baptized, when they come to Years of Understanding, to make a free and open Assent to those Promises, that their Godfathers and Godmothers had engaged for them at their Baptism, to shew that they are Members of Christ's Church, not through Constraint and Force, but that their own Free Will and Choice. This and this only was the first Intent of this truly wise and apostolical Institution. The Reason then, why Christ instituted Positives in his Religion was, you see, not to pester the World with idle and unnecessary Rites; but for the Support and Security of his Moral Virtues. Since therefore the Necessity of our Religious Observation of them proceed not from any intrinsic Goodness, they pretend to have within themselves; but for the Service they render to the Essentials of Christianity. Let us look upon them as they were originally intended, and then we need not fear, but that our Saviour will be,

be, as he has actually promised, with his Church to the End of the World; so that the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. Therefore may God Almighty grant, that we may make such a right Use of our Religion, as that we may live to promote the Honour of God upon Earth, by our rational Service to him, and the Good of Men; by doing whatsoever we would that Men should do unto us, even so let us do unto them; for this is the Law and the Prophets, Matth. viii.

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